A Survey of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement

History, Beliefs, Aims and Work

by

Zahid Aziz

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K.

2008

Published by:

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K.
15 Stanley Avenue, Wembley, U.K., HA0 4JQ

Websites: www.aaiil.org
www.ahmadiyya.org

e-mails: aaiil.uk@gmail.com
info@ahmadiyya.org

Copyright © 2008 Zahid Aziz
All Rights Reserved.

This book is available on the Internet at the link:
www.ahmadiyya.org/intro/survey.pdf

ISBN: 978-1-906109-03-5

Preface

This brief survey is a revised version of an article I published just over ten years ago. It is now being published in booklet form, with amendments and updating, on the hundredth anniversary of the death of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, who passed away in May 1908.

This study provides a summary of the history, beliefs, aims and work of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. It covers similar ground to some of our Movement's earlier publications, but is written from a more modern perspective, connecting earlier issues with recent developments, and bringing the treatment up to date with later events.

Since the time when the original article was first published, the work and approach of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement in its presentation of Islam have become much more vital and critical because of the violent events in the world, both in the West and in Muslim countries, at the beginning of the 21st century. The Movement's role is crucial in creating a peaceful understanding between the Western and the Muslim worlds.

Zahid Aziz, Dr.
March 2008

Contents

Introduction 3
Challenges to religion and Islam 4
Coming of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad 6
Reason and revelation 7
Acclaimed book 9
Mujaddid (Reformer) of the century 10
Death of Jesus 11
Promised Messiah 11
Islam for today's world 13
Islam and other religions 14
Tolerance and the true meaning of Jihad 15
Freedom of religion given by Islam 17
Supremacy of the Quran 17
Real spirit of religion 20
Name 'Ahmadiyya' 22
Finality of prophethood 22
Metaphorical application of the word 'prophet' 24
Tributes upon death 26
Spread of Islam in the West 27
Maulana Muhammad Ali 28
Maulana Muhammad Ali continues Hazrat Mirza's work 30
English translation of the Quran with commentary 30
Book *The Religion of Islam* 32
Other writings 34
Other work of the Lahore Ahmadiyya 35
Woking Muslim Mission 36

Berlin Mosque and Mission 37
Other missions and branches 38
Split in the Ahmadiyya Movement 38
Headship and organisation of the Ahmadiyya Movement 42
Opposition to Movement 43
Ahmadis declared as non-Muslim in Pakistan 43
Legal definition of 'Muslim' 44
Ahmadiyya views influencing other Muslims 46
Summary 46

A Survey of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement

Introduction

Much has been heard in modern times of *jihad* and of militant Islamic parties in Muslim countries, and elsewhere, calling on the faithful to put this teaching of Islam into practice by overthrowing "man-made" or "satanic" systems of government and replacing them with what is called Islamic rule and government. What is less in the public eye is the *jihad* which a certain Muslim movement has been engaged in since the beginning of the twentieth century till today, of peacefully disseminating knowledge of Islam in the world and striving to prove its truth, doing so particularly in Western countries. The battlefield of this *jihad* is not any territory on earth but the hearts and minds of human beings, and the weapons with which it is fought are not the gun and the bomb but argument and evidence.

This, then, is the *jihad* which the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement has been conducting for almost a century. This form of *jihad* is not merely a metaphorical or secondary interpretation of this well-known Islamic teaching, but it is, in fact, the real, the permanent and the greatest form of *jihad.* The repeated exhortations of the Holy Quran to the believers, to strive (do *jihad*) with their lives and property, all apply to the *jihad* of the peaceful propagation of Islam as much as they did to the battles which the Muslims had to fight in self-defence during the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

How did the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement come to be undertaking this rather unusual *jihad?* What is the source of its firm conviction that such a *jihad* will be ultimately successful, when in today's materialistic environment it is held — by non-Muslims and Muslims alike — that success can only be achieved by means of political, military or some other worldly form of power? And how can one believe that Islam, of all religions and ideologies, shall spread in the world without the support and backing of some power or state? These are the questions we now explore.

Challenges to religion and Islam

In modern times, beginning in the early nineteenth century, religion has fallen into much disrepute. As a consequence of man's scientific discoveries and technological advances, serious doubts were created regarding the existence of God. Firstly, if man can himself unravel the mysteries of nature and acquire control over its forces, then he does not stand in need of the concept of God to explain existence or to call upon the All-Powerful for help. Secondly, the super-natural phenomena upon which religion was based — the existence of God, communication from Him to human beings, His extraordinary intervention in the form of miracles — could not be proved or discovered by scientific enquiry. Thirdly, several discoveries of science, particularly about the origin of the universe and of man, plainly disproved the story of creation as understood from religious scriptures.

The assault by science as well as by other modern thinking, and indeed some regrettable aspects of religious history itself, led to religion being regarded as synonymous with superstition, ignorance, intolerance, bigotry, bloodshed, repression, etc.

Besides this crippling assault by modern ideologies upon religion in general, the faith of Islam was suffering further devastating blows as a result of the downfall of Muslim political power in the world. Muslims had long viewed their conquests and rule as being proof of the truth of their religion,

because the Divine promise made for its triumph over the unbelievers had been fulfilled. But now the faithful were facing defeat upon defeat at the hands of the unbelievers. This consequently dented their faith and religious convictions, sending them into despair and despondency. Moreover, Muslims were also facing an ideological assault against their creed by the West. European writers and Christian evangelists and missionaries had amassed mountains of objections against the teachings of Islam and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to show that Islam was not of Divine origin. Far from being revealed by God, it was based, they alleged, on notions borrowed by the Prophet from earlier religions which he then moulded to suit his own ends. Its teachings and moral values, it was asserted, appealed only to the primitive mind, and were utterly out of place in the modern, civilized and enlightened world. It urged its followers to resort to crude violence, and that was how it had succeeded in the past. Christian polemicists, in particular, attributed the gravest failings to the personal character and conduct of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. They sought to show that Jesus, in stark contrast, was perfectly sinless, a teacher of the highest moral qualities, and the true and only saviour of mankind.

It may be rightly said that at no time in the history of Islam had there been such ferocious and overwhelming attacks upon its teachings and its Holy Prophet. The condition of the Muslims — moral, social, intellectual — was so decrepit that they were unable to repulse these threats to their faith. They were intellectually utterly ill-equipped to meet the onslaught of modern thought and science against religious verities. As regards the specific attacks upon Islam, it was an unfortunate fact that many religious notions prevailing commonly among Muslims actually lent strength to many of the criticisms against Islam as a violent, intolerant and repressive system of faith. Muslim religious leaders, in general, slavishly followed the interpretations derived by their predecessors in entirely different times of centuries ago, many of which were irrelevant and

inapplicable now. The minds of the Muslim people were pre-occupied with their worldly losses and misfortunes, and they showed complete apathy and indifference to the disrepute of the religion of Islam in the world.

There were some rare Muslim intellectuals and writers who lamented over the fallen state of their community. One such was Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914) who penned a famous Urdu poem known as the *Musaddus-i Hali,* in which he portrays the decline in the condition of the Muslims as follows:

> Whose ship is trapped in a whirlpool, far from the shore, storm raging around it; likely to flounder and sink at any moment. And yet those on the ship have no sense of danger, and remain in deep slumber, unconcerned. Clouds of misfortune are gathering overhead, adversity is showing itself all around. Evil is threatening from all directions. From left and right the warning is sounded: What were you yesterday and what are you today? You were awake then, you are asleep now!
>
> But the community's heedlessness is such, that it is content with its decayed existence. It grovels in dust and clings to its foolishness. The sun has arisen but it remains asleep in a land of dreams. It shows no regret about its disgrace, nor does it feel envious of the greatness of others.[1]

Coming of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

It was in such circumstances of despair, gloom and despondency that a man by the name of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad grew up in the village of Qadian, Punjab, in India in the middle of the nineteenth century. From his youth, he showed no inclination towards the worldly business to which he was expected to

1. From *Selected Verses of Hali's Musaddus,* translated by Farooqi Mehtar, Durban, South Africa, 1982.

devote his attention by his father, but was absorbed in religious study and contemplation. As he himself writes: "In those days I was so much absorbed in the study of books that it was as if I was not living in this world". In deference to his father's wishes, he pursued some law suits for the recovery of their ancestral land, and also dealt with the family's agricultural affairs, but as he writes: "I was by nature thoroughly averse to such a life" and he "greatly abhorred" those activities because of the kind of unscrupulous and greedy business-like dealing this work required.[2] After his father's death in 1876, he devoted himself entirely to religious study and spiritual exertion.

Reason and revelation

By himself he had made a study of the major religions, their various tendencies, and modern criticism of religion in general as well as of Islam in particular. From 1880 onwards he began the writing of a book, in parts, to prove the truth of the Quran and the Prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad. In this book, published under the title *Barahin Ahmadiyya,* he clarifies the role and mutual relation of reason and revelation. This being the great age of reason, he proceeded on the principle that the teachings of a Revealed Book should satisfy human reason. While religious beliefs cannot be derived from reason, but can only be taught by revelation, it is still a necessary condition for a true belief that it must conform to reason and not violate it. He also laid down some other criteria for a Revealed Book, one condition being that such a book should itself put forward its claims, its teachings, and arguments in support of its claims, and not be dependent on its followers to make claims and provide supporting arguments on its behalf. He then carried out a comparative study to show that only the Holy Quran satisfies any of this criteria. He sought to prove, so far as it can be proved, that the Quran was the Word of God and the Revelation of the most perfect order.

2. These quotations are from his book *Kitab-ul-Barriyya,* published January 1898.

While giving due recognition to the place of reason, he also established that man's intellect could only take him a part of the way towards God, but not actually bring him to full conviction of the existence of the Supreme Being. That could only be done by God showing Himself to man through revelation. Thus revelation was a necessity, and quite indispensable, for the higher, moral and spiritual development of mankind.

Ours is an age not just of philosophical reasoning but of experiment and observation as well. No phenomenon can be accepted merely on the basis of being reported or recorded in a book, but requires to be demonstrated or reproduced in practice. As Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad sought to show that revelation from God containing knowledge unknown to man did indeed occur, which was being widely doubted and denied, and this of course is the basis of belief in the Quran as the Word of God, he had to demonstrate the coming of revelation as a living experience. Islam recognises the continuance of a form of revelation that was shared by both prophets and other righteous human beings, coming to Muslims of high spiritual rank even though prophethood ended with the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Hazrat Mirza was extensively a recipient of such spiritual experience, and he put forward his visions, dreams and revelations to prove that there does exist God Who communicates with man. According to Hadith reports from the Holy Prophet Muhammad, there shall arise among Muslims "men who are spoken to by God without being prophets", and he has used the term *muhaddath* for such persons.[3]

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad thus performed a service not only for Islam but for religion in general by showing to the modern materialistic world, which believed only in things that could be observed, detected and measured physically, that revelation from God, the basis of all religion, is an objective reality.

3. See the Hadith collections *Bukhari* and *Muslim* in their books on 'Qualities of the Companions' under *Umar.*

Hazrat Mirza thus reached a happy medium between reason and revelation. He did not reject reason and enquiry in the spiritual realm, as the traditionalists in religion were prone to do, but accepted its value in judging between truth and untruth. However, he pointed to the limitations of intellect alone, unaided by spiritual guidance, and held that reliance purely on reason cannot lead man to the higher truths.

Acclaimed book

His first book, which contained this line of argument and pointed to his own experience of revelation, was the *Barahin Ahmadiyya,* mentioned above. Its appearance, at the very commencement of the fourteenth century *Hijra* (1883), was welcomed by most Muslim *Ulama* and leaders of Muslim opinion in India, and lavish tributes were paid to it and to the services of the author to the faith of Islam. A leader of the Ahl-i Hadith sect, Muhammad Husain Batalvi, wrote as follows in his magazine:

> "…this book, at this time and in view of the present circumstances, is such that the like of it has not appeared in Islam up till now … all the followers of Islam, whether Ahl-i-Hadith, Shiah or Sunni, are obliged to support this book and its printing. The author of *Barahin Ahmadiyya* has saved the honour of the Muslims." [4]

The editor of another magazine, after referring to the attacks upon Islam from all quarters, wrote:

> "It was our long-cherished wish that someone among the Muslim *Ulama* … should write a book meeting the needs of the present age, containing rational arguments and factual evidence to prove that the Holy Quran is the word of God and the Holy Prophet Muhammad's

4. Muhammad Husain Batalvi in *Isha'at-us-Sunna,* June–August 1884, p. 169 and p. 348.

> prophethood is true. Thank God that this wish has been fulfilled. This is the very book the preparation of which had been desired for so long: *Barahin Ahmadiyya,* … a marvellous book, every word of which proves the true faith and shows the truth of the Quran"

The same editor wrote in a later issue of his magazine:

> "It is impossible to praise this book too highly. The fact is that the deep research with which this book has proved the argument for Islam upon the opponents of the faith, needs no praise or eulogy. But we cannot refrain from saying that the book is without parallel." [5]

Mujaddid (Reformer) of the century

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad also announced in this book that, in accordance with the promise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad that:

> "Allah shall raise for this *Umma,* at the head of every century, one who shall renew (or revive) for it its religion" [6]

he was that man raised in the 14th century *Hijra,* the *mujaddid* (reformer or reviver of faith) of the century. This claim was generally accepted due to his reputation as a champion of the Islamic cause, and certainly it aroused no opposition.

Besides modern thought and criticism, the other great adversary facing Islam since the middle of the nineteenth century was the Christian missionary effort directed at Muslims. A chief line of attack adopted by these proselytisers was to argue that the Quran itself ascribes to Jesus certain divine-like qualities and works which are impossible to be achieved by any mortal human being, including the Prophet

5. Muhammad Sharif in *Akhbar Manshur Muhammadi,* Bangalore, issue of 25 *Rajab,* 1300 A.H., p. 214, and issue of 5 *Jamadi al-Awwal,* 1301 A.H.
6. *Sunan Abu Dawud, Kitab-ul-Malahim,* ch. 1.

Muhammad. Therefore, Muslims must accept the divinity of Jesus as confirmed by their own faith, and join Christianity.

Islamic religious leaders were greatly handicapped in refuting this line of attack because certain traditional Muslim interpretations did appear to support the Christian contention. One such notion was the generally-held belief by Muslims that Jesus had not died but had been taken up to God in bodily form while physically alive, and in the last days he would descend physically from heaven to lead Muslims to triumph in the world. To put it starkly, this widely-prevalent but misconceived belief implied that Jesus was alive with God in heaven while the Prophet Muhammad lay dead in the ground in Madina; the latter could no longer do anything for his followers while the former was to come in great glory as their saviour; the biological laws of human survival, old age and death applied to the Prophet Muhammad (and all other prophets) but Jesus was free of all these limitations, being alive for almost 2000 years without eating and drinking, and unaltered in bodily form till today as if he were still 33 years of age.

Death of Jesus

As Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the *mujaddid* inspired by God to defend and extend the cause of Islam, his mind was illuminated by Divine light to receive the solution to this intractable problem. He announced, in 1891, that the belief in Jesus being physically lifted up to heaven was erroneous. Just as there are examples of other prophets being saved by God from death at the hands of their enemies and then dying a natural death later on, similarly Jesus, having survived death on the cross, had died on this earth after spending his remaining life. Hazrat Mirza established this on the basis of the Holy Quran and Hadith reports. Jesus was not alive now, but had died long ago, and would not return.

Promised Messiah

But what of the Hadith prophecies speaking in detail of his return, and the signs of the last days such as the coming of a

monstrous, one-eyed creature called *dajjal* who would wield divine-like power over the world and reduce the Muslims to utter helplessness, and who was to be vanquished by Jesus on his return? These Hadith reports are so widespread and well-recognised that they cannot all be rejected as spurious.[7]

Hazrat Mirza, again under Divine inspiration, offered a solution to this most perplexing riddle. Prophecies generally must be interpreted metaphorically, not literally, and by the coming of Jesus is meant the coming of a *mujaddid* of the Muslims bearing a likeness to Jesus, at a time and in circumstances similar to those in which Jesus arose. And who and where was the *dajjal* against whom the Messiah was to fight? All the signs of this *dajjal* were met with in the materialistic and the religious sides of modern Western civilisation. The Messiah of the prophecies, or the Promised Messiah, would have to counter the materialism and atheism of this civilisation, and show to it the existence of spiritual realities, and he would also have to refute the religious propagandists of this civilisation who were preaching the divinity of Jesus while he had taught the oneness of God.

The expected coming of Jesus was associated, in the prophecies, with the triumph of Islam in the whole world, and that was the mission which Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad proclaimed as being his. We may quote here from some of his writings published at the time when he first made the claim to be the Promised Messiah:

> "Do not wonder that Almighty God has, in this time of need and in the days of this deep darkness, sent down a heavenly light and, having chosen a servant of His for the good of mankind in general, He has sent him to make uppermost the religion of Islam and to spread the light brought by the 'best of His creatures' [i.e. Prophet

7. For example, see *Bukhari, Kitab-ul-anbiya* and *Kitab-ul-fitn,* and *Muslim, Kitab-ul-iman* and *Kitab-ul-fitn.*

> Muhammad] and to strengthen the cause of the Muslims and to purify their internal condition … The truth will win and the freshness and light of Islam which characterised it in the earlier days will be restored, and that sun will rise again as it arose first, in the full resplendence of its light." [8]

Referring to a sign in Hadith that "the sun will rise from the West",[9] he writes:

> "What has been shown to me in a vision is this, that the rising of the sun from the West signifies that the Western world which has been involved of old in the darkness of unbelief and error shall be made to shine with the sun of Truth, and those people shall have their share of Islam. … In reality, the Western countries have, up to this time, shown very little aptitude for religious truths, as if spiritual wisdom had in its entirety been granted to Asia, and material wisdom to Europe and America … now Almighty God intends to cast on them the look of mercy." [10]

> "In this critical time, a man has been raised up by God and he desires that he may show the beautiful face of Islam to the whole world and open its ways to the Western countries." [11]

Islam for today's world

These were not merely claims. In his writings and lectures, particularly from 1891 when he claimed to be the Promised Messiah till his death in 1908, Hazrat Mirza has presented the principles of Islam in such a way as to show that they answer the doubts and questions of the modern age and meet the needs

8. Booklet *Fath-i Islam,* published 1891, p. 7 and pp. 15–16.
9. *Bukhari, Kitab-ul-fitn,* and *Kitab-ul-tafsir* under *Sura* 6.
10. *Izala Auham,* published 1891, pp. 515–516.
11. *Izala Auham,* p. 769.

of the time. In this article, we have not the scope for giving even a proper summary of all the teachings that he put forward. However, it is essential to mention certain points as below.

Islam and other religions

Islam teaches that, before the Holy Prophet Muhammad, God raised prophets among all nations, and as is well-known, Muslims believe in the Israelite prophets, many of whom are mentioned in the Holy Quran. Hazrat Mirza explained, much more explicitly than any previous Muslim thinker or theologian, that this implies that the founders of the other great religions, besides the prophets of the Bible, were also prophets raised by God who received revelation. So Muslims should accept, for example, the great Hindu sages, Buddha, Confucius, etc. as true prophets of God. He laid great stress on the Islamic teaching of the universality of revelation, and contrasted it with the views of various religions which confined the great gift of God's guidance to just their own nation, tribe or land. Commenting on the first verse of the Quran where Allah is described as "Lord of the worlds" he writes:

> "Opening the Holy Quran with this verse, which embodies such breadth of view, is a reply to those nations who limit, each to itself, the universal bounty and providence of God, and regard other peoples as though they were not a creation of God. … In the Holy Quran it is explained by various examples that just as Almighty God has been providing for the physical needs of the people of every country, so also has He been providing for the spiritual sustenance of every land and nation." [12]

He believed that Muslims could establish peaceful relations with followers of other religions, such as the Hindu religion in his own country, by accepting the Divine origin of those faiths,

12. *Message of Peace,* English Translation of lecture *Paigham-i Sulh* delivered 1908, p. 2 and p. 3.

and he proposed that followers of the other religions reciprocate by showing respect for the Holy Prophet Muhammad. In the modern world of travel and movement, with a much greater inter-mingling of followers of different religions than in the past, Hazrat Mirza has clarified the relation of Islam with other religions on a basis enabling Muslims and others to live in peace and harmony. He strongly supported the holding of inter-faith conferences where, in his words, the advocates of each faith would show the virtues and merits of their respective religions, rather than find fault with others. It is essential to point this out because he was forced to devote much of his time to refuting the most vituperative, scurrilous and bitter attacks on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad by Christian missionaries and leaders of the Arya Samaj Hindu sect. His statements made in response are often quoted out of their proper context to create an entirely false impression that he aggressively assailed other religions, while in fact he made it clear that such responses were specifically directed against venomous, unjustified attacks on Islam by particular individuals.

Tolerance and the true meaning of Jihad

A related point upon which he laid stress is the Islamic teaching of tolerance and generosity towards other religious communities. This is also connected with clarifying the doctrine of Jihad and associated questions. Hazrat Mirza reiterated that Islam teaches its followers to show the greatest human sympathy, respect and kindness towards all human beings, regardless of their religion. Religious and doctrinal differences with others must never incite us to be unjust to them. Jihad as taught by Islam was not, as generally thought, the act of physically attacking non-Muslims or fighting a war against them. It may only take that form under special circumstances if an enemy seeks to destroy Muslims by force of arms. Jihad is a permanent struggle of two main kinds:

1. An individual’s struggle to conquer his or her own passions and wrongful desires.

2. The individual and collective struggle to present the message of Islam to the world by means of knowledge and argument. It was to this true Jihad that Hazrat Mirza directed his followers. The Quran itself commands Muslims: *Wa jāhid-hum bi-hi jihād-an kabīr-an* (25:52), meaning, Conduct a mighty jihad against the unbelievers by means of the Quran.

In the time of Hazrat Mirza, the doctrine of Jihad was greatly misunderstood by most Muslims as well as the critics of Islam. It is little different today, a hundred years later, with the tragic international consequences that we see. *Jihad* was taken to mean that Muslims were required to wage war against unbelievers. Naturally this portrayed Islam as a violent religion. By explaining the true meaning of this teaching, as found in the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad, a great stigma was removed from the name of Islam. It was also taught by Hazrat Mirza that Muslims could not only live peacefully under non-Muslim rule, but indeed it was an obligation upon the Muslim citizens of a non-Muslim state to be law-abiding citizens of that country if they had the freedom in it to practise and preach their religion. He had a deep conviction that if Islam was propagated by argument and peaceful means it would win over the hearts of the non-Muslim nations ruling the Muslims. Therefore he wished to dissociate Islam altogether from force, violence and fanaticism. He also believed that, being in the likeness of the Messiah, he too should adopt peaceful means of preaching, and reject recourse to force.

Another consequence of his teaching in this respect is that Muslims can do their duty, as citizens, of obeying the secular authorities and at the same time follow their religious obligations of moral and spiritual progress, rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and rendering unto God that which is God's — a distinction which it is generally thought Islam does not teach a Muslim to make. There are today Muslim minorities in every Western country, and also in other non-Muslim countries, who have to do exactly that. However,

Hazrat Mirza did not believe that Muslims should do this out of opportunism, pragmatism or hypocrisy, but sincerely out of conviction. His approach was entirely opposed to the notion of rebelling against the authorities to establish a so-called Islamic government. In this age of argument and reasoning, he wanted Muslims to prove the truth of their religion and thereby change the thinking of their non-Muslim rulers.

Freedom of religion given by Islam

A final point in this connection is that the Islamic teaching giving every individual the freedom of religion and of expression was greatly stressed by Hazrat Mirza. Not only does Islam recognise the freedom of non-Muslims to follow their own faiths, but a Muslim too is free to adopt another religion without fear of any legal penalty. Followers of Hazrat Mirza, as well as some other Muslims, have proved from the Holy Quran and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad that it is a sheer misconception to believe that so-called "apostasy" is punishable in Islam by any penalty whatsoever, still less the death penalty. Similarly, there is no punishable crime in Islam of "blasphemy" or "insulting" or "abusing" the Holy Prophet Muhammad, who himself underwent the bitterest abuse in his lifetime yet never sentenced anyone to any punishment for it. As regards vituperative and offensive books written against Islam, Hazrat Mirza was of the view that the allegations contained in them must be refuted. Calls for the banning of such literature, which in any case is quite widespread and impossible to eliminate, or demands for action against its authors, merely encourage the impression that Muslims are unable to refute it. Hazrat Mirza believed that once doubts and questions have been raised in people's minds, they cannot be removed by banning books but by countering them with accurate and authentic knowledge.

Supremacy of the Quran

As part of his reform work, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad stressed to Muslims that they must restore the Quran to its

rightful place that it should occupy in their individual as well as collective lives. Muslims no doubt held the Quran in very high reverence, but the ordinary Muslim used it only for formal recitation without knowing its meanings, this being done to mark certain important occasions in particular. The religious leaders and scholars based their understanding of the Quran on commentaries and books of law written centuries ago, which they regarded as providing the final, unalterable exposition of its meanings. With rare exceptions, they did not attempt to study the Quran directly and seek guidance from it on problems and questions arising in modern times. They declared it as unlawful to translate the Quran into another language and felt not the least concern for spreading its message in the world.

The Quran was thus a closed book to the Muslims, and Hazrat Mirza opened it up for them to use as intended by this holy Book itself. He thus addressed his own followers:

> "Read the Quran with understanding, and love it very greatly. Love it as you have not loved anything else because God has informed me that all types of good are in the Quran. Pity be on those people who give precedence to something else over it. The source of all your success and salvation lies in the Quran. … God has done you an immense favour by giving you a book like the Quran… so value the blessing given to you."[13]

He taught the principle that the Quran is the supreme authority of Islam, and anything found in sources such as Hadith, Islamic law books, commentaries of the Quran and histories, which conflicts with clear statements of the Quran, cannot be accepted as such. If possible it must be interpreted to accord with the Quran, otherwise it must be rejected. Following this principle enabled him to remove misconceptions about Islamic teachings on many points and to establish the truth.

13. *Kishti-i Nuh,* p. 24.

The death of Jesus, in addition to his survival from death on the cross, is clearly mentioned in the Quran. However, on the basis of Hadith reports prophesying his return to this world, Muslim scholars of a later age held that Jesus had never died but had been raised up to God's presence in his living body, and thereby they overruled the Quran by those reports. Hazrat Mirza, however, gave precedence to the Quran and subjected the Hadith reports to the Quran's verdict. Thus he proved that Jesus had died and reports of his second coming could be interpreted metaphorically to conform with this.

Another point clarified in this way relates to religious freedom in Islam. The Quran recognises full freedom of religion for everyone to adopt whatever religion anyone wishes, but Muslim jurists and scholars had drawn the conclusion from some reports in Hadith and other sources that if a Muslim leaves the religion of Islam he must be sentenced to death unless he returns to Islam. By placing the Quran first and accepting it as definitive and absolute, and treating other sources as secondary and accepting them conditionally, it is clear that there is no punishment whatsoever prescribed by Islam for apostasy. The related issues of the meaning of *jihad* and the conditions under which Muslims are allowed to wage war can also be easily settled by giving precedence to the Quran, and we find that Islam does not at all allow Muslims to engage in unprovoked, aggressive war, nor does *jihad* mean war. The widely-held view of Muslim scholars that certain later verses of the Quran have abrogated or cancelled injunctions in certain verses that were revealed earlier has also been proved to be wrong by the Ahmadiyya Movement on the basis that there is no inconsistency in the Quran.

It was because Hazrat Mirza brought the Quran to the forefront that his followers started its translations and their dissemination in the world at a time when hardly any translations by Muslims existed.

Real spirit of religion

The last point we mention regarding the reform work of Hazrat Mirza is that he presented Islam as a religion which enables contact to be attained with the Living God, thus allowing man to free himself from sin and reach a high moral plane through a true, heart-felt belief in God. The acts of worship prescribed by Islam had generally come to be performed as mere mechanical rituals. People laid the greatest stress on fulfilling meticulously the minute details of the outward forms, but they generally neglected the true spirit which should be in the heart, nor did they care much for achieving the real aim and purpose of these devotions. Likewise, there would be intense discussions on whether some small and insignificant thing was lawful or unlawful, while the committing of much greater wrongs would just be ignored. This was one of the stark similarities between the condition of Muslims in Hazrat Mirza's time and the state of the Jews in the time of Jesus. He also advanced this as an evidence of his being the Promised Messiah:

> "Just as in the last days of the Mosaic law a prophet arose named Jesus, in a time when the moral condition of the Jews had deteriorated completely, they had strayed very far from real virtue, … their knowledge and thought was confined merely to formalism and worship of the letter … similarly it is necessary that among the Muslim people too there should arise a *muhaddath* (i.e. inspired saint) in the likeness of that prophet and of his time, when they have also degenerated in the same manner as that in which the Jews had in the time of Jesus." [14]

Note that while claiming to have come in the likeness of the prophet Jesus, he explains his position as that of being a *muhaddath,* which is a term in Sahih Bukhari meaning "one to whom God speaks but who is not a prophet".

14. *Testimony of the Holy Quran* (*Shahadat-ul-Quran*), p. 67.

Hazrat Mirza wrote, stressed and stated, again and again, that mere lip-profession and performance of rituals is not accepted by God unless it is accompanied by an actual transformation in one's character and behaviour, and the giving up of low desires and bad habits and their replacement by purity of thought and sincerity of action. He believed that the effect of faith and religious practices upon anyone should be measured by an observable reform in their behaviour and dealings with others. If no positive change takes place in a man who says his prayers, does fasting, etc., then this is proof that there is something wrong with the way in which he carries out these obligations, no matter how much attention he may be paying to the details of the outward forms. Hazrat Mirza once explained his mission of Muslim reform as follows:

> "Our religion is the same Islam. It is not new. There are the same prayers, the same fasts, the same pilgrimage, and the same zakat. But the difference is that as these duties are now performed in outward form only, without any true spirit in them, we want to infuse in them the spirit of sincerity. We want these duties to be performed in such a manner that they are effective." [15]

He urged Muslims to make these observances, especially the daily prayers, as the means of realising the existence of God in their lives, by performing them from the heart and mind, and not with the body only. He warned against the false satisfaction and self-deceiving sense of achievement which a person feels when he fulfils the external form of a religious duty, deluding himself that his past sins have been washed off by merely performing a mechanical ritual.

To followers of other religions too, he argued that salvation, which is promised by all faiths, cannot simply be deliverance from punishment in the next life, but its signs must

15. Talk on 12 July 1907, reproduced in *Malfuzat,* vol. 9, p. 312.

be observable in the "saved" person in this life in terms of the Divine assistance which he receives.

Name 'Ahmadiyya'

For about twelve years after the Ahmadiyya Movement was founded, it had no name. Its members were often referred to by others as 'Mirzaees' (or followers of Mirza). When the census for the year 1901 was to be taken, and Hazrat Mirza learnt that on the census form a person could indicate his sect in addition to his religion, he issued an announcement giving his movement the name *Muslims of the Ahmadiyya Section.* The rationale for this name, he explained, was that 'Ahmad' was one of the two main names of the Holy Prophet, the other name being 'Muhammad'. 'Ahmad' and 'Muhammad' stood for the qualities of the Holy Prophet which he displayed in his life at Makka and at Madina respectively. The name 'Ahmad' symbolised the inner beauty of Islam, and the name 'Muhammad' its outward glory. At Makka Islam was devoid of political rule, and spread by means of pure preaching; at Madina Muslims possessed physical power and rule, and they overcame their enemies by responding to their aggression with force. The condition of the Muslims in the present age and the way forward for them, said Hazrat Mirza, corresponded to the Holy Prophet's life at Makka. Therefore it was appropriate that the Movement which believes that Islam's mission in the present age is to show the beauty of its teachings by peaceful preaching, in the circumstances when Muslims are devoid of worldly power, should be named after the Holy Prophet Muhammad's name Ahmad.

Finality of prophethood

As there are very serious misconceptions about the claims of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, we now turn to this topic. Because of his claim that the Messiah prophesied in Hadith was himself, and not Jesus, he was accused by his opponents from among the Muslim *Ulama* of claiming to be a prophet and denying the belief that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was the

last and final prophet of God. In reply, he issued repeated denials of having made this claim and affirmed that he believed the Holy Prophet Muhammad to be the Last Prophet. In fact, one argument he advanced in support of his own claim, and against the common view that Jesus would return to this world, was that Jesus being a prophet cannot come after the Prophet Muhammad. Referring to the Holy Prophet's description in the Quran as the 'Seal of the Prophets' (*Khatam-un-nabiyyin*), he wrote:

1. "The Holy Quran does not permit the coming of any messenger after the 'Seal of the Prophets', whether he would be a new messenger or a former one." — *Izala Auham,* p. 761.
2. "By saying *'There is no prophet after me',* the Holy Prophet Muhammad closed the door absolutely to any new prophet or the return of any old prophet." — *Ayyam-us-Sulh,* p. 152.
3. "The real fact, to which I testify with the highest testimony, is that our Holy Prophet is the 'Seal of the Prophets', and after him no prophet will come, neither any old one nor any new one." — *Anjam Atham,* p. 27, footnote.

Thus, neither a previous prophet and messenger such as Jesus, nor a new prophet and messenger, could arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Denying the allegation against himself of claiming to be a prophet, he wrote:

1. "Those people have fabricated a lie against me who say that I claim to be a prophet." — *Hamamat-ul-Bushra,* p. 8.
2. "I have not claimed prophethood, nor have I said to them that I am a prophet … I did not say anything to the people except what I wrote in my books, namely, that I am a *muhaddath* and God speaks to me as He

speaks to those who are *muhaddath. ...* It does not befit me that I should claim prophethood and leave Islam and join the disbelievers. … How could I claim prophethood when I am a Muslim?" — *ibid.,* p. 79.

3. "I also curse the person who claims prophethood, and I believe that 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger', and I have faith in the finality of prophethood of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. … there is no claim of prophethood on my part either, only a claim of sainthood (*wilaya*) and reformership (*mujaddidiyya*)."

   — Announcement dated January 1897; *Majmu'a Ishtiharat,* vol. 2, pp. 297–298.

The position held by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was that of a saint (*wali*), one who receives revelation as a non-prophet (*muhaddath*), and the reformer of his time (*mujaddid*), all of which are recognised spiritual ranks among Muslims. In his capacity as *mujaddid,* he received from Allah the title 'Messiah', reflecting the kind of work he was appointed to do.

Metaphorical application of the word 'prophet'

In the writings of the spiritual savants of Islam, terms such as prophet (*nabi*) and messenger (*rasul*) are sometimes used to refer to Muslim saints in a metaphorical sense when it is necessary to show the likeness of a saint's work to that of a prophet. When Hazrat Mirza claimed to be the Promised Messiah, his opponents raised the objection that the Messiah to come must be a prophet because he is so described in the Hadith prophecies; so how, they asked, could he be the Messiah as a non-prophet? The reply given by Hazrat Mirza, over a number of years repeatedly, was that the term "prophet" in Hadith should be taken metaphorically, not in a real sense, and that a Muslim saint may be metaphorically called prophet and messenger. He cited instances of such clear metaphorical usage, even in the Quran and Hadith. He explained:

> "The epithet 'prophet of God' for the Promised Messiah to come, which is to be found in *Sahih Muslim* etc. from the blessed tongue of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, is meant in the same metaphorical sense as that in which it occurs in Sufi literature as an accepted and common term for the recipient of Divine communication. Otherwise, how can there be a prophet after the 'Seal of the Prophets'." — *Anjam Atham,* footnote, p. 28.

> "God speaks to, and communicates with, His saints (*auliya*) in this *Umma*, and they are given the colouring of prophets. However, they are not prophets in reality." — *Mawahib-ur-Rahman,* pp. 66–67.

Thus the terms 'prophet' or 'messenger' as referring to Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, whether when applying the Hadith prophecies to him or occurring in his own spiritual experiences, are used metaphorically. He himself has stated again and again that these terms:

- "do not bear their real sense"
- "are not meant by way of reality"
- "are used by way of metaphor"
- "are meant in a metaphorical and figurative sense" [16]

And he wrote in one of his last books:

> "I have been called a prophet by God by way of metaphor, not by way of reality." [17]

Those of his statements which are frequently quoted by the anti-Ahmadiyya propagandists, as well as by the Qadiani group, to try to prove that he claimed to be a prophet, must be

16. For these extracts, see: *Siraj Munir,* pp. 2–3; *Anjam Atham,* pp. 27–28, footnote; *Arba'in,* No. 2, p. 18, footnote; *Arba'i n,* No. 3, p. 25, footnote.

17. *Haqiqat-ul-Wahy,* Supplement, p. 64.

read in the light of his own explanations; and by doing so it will be easily discovered that his claim is not of being a prophet, as is commonly alleged.

Tributes upon death

When Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad died in May 1908, after a life devoted to the service of Islam, he was paid the highest tributes by many Muslim religious leaders and journalists, from which some short extracts are given here:

> "The services of the deceased which he rendered to Islam in its confrontation with Christianity and the Arya Samaj deserve the highest praise." [18]
>
> "…justice requires that one should condole the death of such a resolute defender of Islam, helper of the Muslims, and an eminent and irreplaceable scholar." [19]
>
> "Undoubtedly the deceased was a great fighter for Islam." [20]
>
> "Such people who produce a religious or intellectual revolution are not born often. … In spite of our strong differences with Mirza sahib in respect of some of his claims and beliefs, his separation forever has convinced the educated and enlightened Muslims that one of their very great personages has left them. … he acted against the enemies of Islam as a victorious general … this service rendered by Mirza sahib will place the coming generations under a debt of gratitude, in that he fulfilled his duty of jihad by the pen, and he left behind him as a memorial such literature as will last so long as Muslims have blood flowing in their veins." [21]

18. *Curzon Gazette,* Delhi, 1st June 1908.
19. *Sadiq-ul-Akhbar,* Rewari, May 1908.
20. The editor, *Aligarh* Institute *Gazette,* June 1908.
21. *Wakeel,* Amritsar, edited by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Spread of Islam in the West

In his capacity as the Promised Messiah who was to combat the *dajjal,* as mentioned earlier, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad considered it a most vital and essential part of his mission to present the teachings of Islam to the Western world. Such great importance did he attach to this that when he established the annual conference of the Ahmadiyya Movement, to be held for three days every December, he announced one of its permanent objects as being that:

> "…one of the essential requirements of this gathering will be to consider plans for the spiritual well-being of Europe and America, for it is now established that the good-natured people of Europe and America are getting ready to accept Islam." [22]

He expressed the deepest conviction that Islam, in its true and original form, was the religion that would satisfy the spiritual needs of the modern West, despite the fact that the modern world appeared to be rejecting religion as an anachronism, and despite the fact, of course, that Islam was looked upon in the West at that time with the greatest detestation and abhorrence. Indeed, he saw visions of Western people accepting Islam, and described the British of his times as "the eggs from which the young of Islam shall hatch in the future".[23]

Referring to the Western countries, he wrote:

> "I would advise that … writings of an excellent kind should be sent into these countries. If my people help me heart and soul I wish to prepare a commentary of the Quran which should be sent to them after it has been rendered into the English language. I cannot refrain from stating clearly that this is my work, and

22. Announcement, December 1892. *Majmu'a Ishtiharat,* v. 1, pp. 340–341.
23. *Nur-ul-Haq,* Part I, published 1894, p. 44.

> that no one else can do it as well as I or he who is an offshoot of mine and thus is included in me." [24]

Maulana Muhammad Ali

These words were written in a book published in September 1891. Some six years later, a young man in his early twenties, by the name of Muhammad Ali, who was one of the very few among Muslims receiving a Western-style modern college education, joined the Ahmadiyya Movement. Hazrat Mirza recognised his potential immediately and foresaw that he was destined to be a source of great strength to the Movement's cause. He announced:

> "I am very pleased that another righteous young man has joined our community, namely, Maulvi Muhammad Ali, M.A., advocate. I have very high hopes of him. … I am sure that my prediction will not go wrong that this young man will make progress in the way of Allah, and set such examples of being steadfast in righteousness and love of the faith as ought to be emulated by his peers." [25]

Having completed his education, the young Muhammad Ali was ready to start his practice in law in the year 1900 when Hazrat Mirza asked him to devote his life wholly for the cause of Islam and to edit an English language journal which he was proposing to establish. Hazrat Mirza wrote:

> "It was always a matter of concern and anxiety for me that all the truths, spiritual knowledge, solid arguments in support of the religion of Islam, and things to satisfy the human soul, which were disclosed to me, and are still being disclosed, had not given any benefit to the modernly-educated classes of this country and to the students of truth among the Westerners. This pain was

24. *Izala Auham,* p. 773.

25. Announcement, 4th October 1899. *Majmu'a Ishtiharat,* v. 3, pp. 157–158.

> so intense as to be unbearable any more. … Therefore, to fulfill the object which is the real purpose of my life, a proposal has arisen, and that is to bring out a magazine in English for the objects mentioned above." [26]

Thus, to fulfill what he calls "the real purpose of my life" Hazrat Mirza appointed Maulana Muhammad Ali as editor of this magazine, entitled *The Review of Religions,* which started publication in the year 1901. The circulation of this magazine — a unique Islamic magazine for its time — extended beyond India to as far as the U.S.A. and Russia. In this monthly journal Hazrat Mirza spoke to the West through the English words of Maulana Muhammad Ali.

It is recorded in the Ahmadiyya community's newspaper *Badr* that one day in February 1907 Hazrat Mirza called Maulana Muhammad Ali to him and directed him as follows:

> "It is my wish that, to fulfill the duty of propagation of Islam to Europe and America, a book be written in English. This is your work. The reason why Islam does not spread in those countries at this time … is that those people do not know its real teachings nor have these been put before them. They have the right to be shown the real Islam… All those matters with which the honour of Islam is connected in this age, and all those arguments which God Almighty has given me to prove the truth of Islam, should be collected together so as to compile a comprehensive book, from which these people can greatly benefit." [27]

Thus Hazrat Mirza had charged Maulana Muhammad Ali with the general task of presenting to the world, in a systematic and detailed form, the faith-reviving picture of Islam which he had unveiled in his capacity as the *mujaddid* of the time. The

26. Announcement, January 1901. *Majmu'a Ishtiharat,* v. 3, pp. 393–394.
27. *Malfuzat,* vol. 9, pp. 191–192.

particular book which the Maulana wrote in fulfilment of this specific instruction is mentioned further on below.

Maulana Muhammad Ali continues Hazrat Mirza's work

The Maulana set himself to this work of the presentation of Islam and continued it incessantly till the end of his life in 1951. However, shortly after he had begun it, a schism took place in the Ahmadiyya Movement in the year 1914. This led to the founding, in Lahore, of the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam,* meaning the Ahmadiyya Society for the Propagation of Islam, under the Maulana's headship. Later on we give some details of the background and causes of these events. Suffice it here to note that much the greater part of the Maulana's work which we now discuss was done after he became the head of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement.

English translation of the Quran with commentary

The first great step in this path was producing the English translation of the Holy Quran, with full commentary, which he began in 1909, shortly after Hazrat Mirza's death. This voluminous work was published in 1917. It was not the first English translation by a Muslim, as two or three such works had appeared shortly before it in India, but these were little known and confined only to a very limited circulation. The Maulana's work was certainly the first by a Muslim to be in general circulation and the first by a Muslim to be available in the West, printed and published as it was in England. Moreover, as a Muslim reviewer noted many years later, it was:

> "…the first work published by any Muslim with the thoroughness worthy of Quranic scholarship and achieving the standards of modern publications." [28]

Many were the tributes paid to it, by Muslims as well as non-Muslims, for example:

28. H. Amir Ali, *The Student's Quran,* London, 1961, p. iv.

- "accurate and reliable"
- "a valuable service not only to Islam but to the public at large"
- "chaste and simple language"
- "among human productions of literary masterpieces, it undoubtedly claims a position of distinction and pre-eminence"
- "a work of which any scholar might legitimately be proud".

An Indian Sunni Muslim scholar, Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, who himself later translated the Quran, wrote that:

> "To deny the excellence of Maulvi Muhammad Ali's translation, the influence it has exercised and its proselytising utility, would be to deny the light of the sun."

He added:

> "The translation certainly helped in bringing thousands of non-Muslims to the Muslim fold and hundreds of thousands of unbelievers much nearer Islam."

He went on to relate how this translation:

> "…brought me towards Islam when I was groping in darkness, atheism and scepticism." [29]

Another Sunni Muslim reviewer wrote:

> "…the simplicity of its language and the correctness of the version are all enviable. The writer has kept his annotations altogether free from sectarian influence with wonderful impartiality." [30]

The famous Muslim nationalist leader Mohammad Ali Jauhar wrote about this work as follows:

---

29. *Such,* Lucknow, 25 June 1943.
30. *Wakeel,* Amritsar, India.

> "… an austerely faithful translation in English and copious footnotes based on a close study of commentaries of the Quran … the work of my learned namesake, Maulvi Muhammad Ali of Lahore, leader of a fairly numerous religious community" [31]

> " … the simplicity and precision and the adherence to the text indicate the reverence due to God's own Word from a true believer … there now exists in at least one European language a rendering of the holy Quran done by a true believer and not by a scoffer, by one who believes every word of the Book to be God's own, every word to be true and full of light…" [32]

The Maulana's translation made a considerable impression in the Muslim world as well as in the West, and was for several years the only Muslim English translation and commentary available. The other well-known English translations by Muslims appeared several years later, and undoubtedly derived benefit from the Maulana's work. Towards the end of his life, after the Second World War, the Maulana thoroughly revised his 1917 translation and commentary. The language of the translation was made simpler and the commentary was brought up to date in the light of the changed world conditions. The revised edition was first published in 1951.

This English work has itself been translated into other languages including Dutch, German, Spanish, French and Russian.

Book *The Religion of Islam*

As quoted above, Hazrat Mirza had wanted Maulana Muhammad Ali to write a comprehensive book on Islam in English. This the Maulana did in the form of the voluminous work *The Religion of Islam* which was first published in 1936.

31. *My Life — A Fragment,* edited by Afzal Iqbal, Lahore, 1966, p. 115.
32. *The Islamic Review,* December 1919.

It deals in full detail with the sources of Islam (the Quran, Hadith, Jurisprudence), the beliefs and doctrines of Islam, and its practices. It earned a magnificent review from Marmaduke Pickthall, a British Muslim and himself a translator of the Quran into English. He wrote in the *Islamic Culture quarterly,* of which he was editor:

> "Probably no man living has done longer or more valuable service for the cause of Islamic revival than Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore. His literary works, with those of the late Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, have given fame and distinction to the Ahmadiyya Movement. In our opinion the present volume is his finest work. … Such a book is greatly needed when in many Muslim countries we see persons eager for the revival of Islam, making mistakes through lack of just this knowledge. … We do not always agree with Maulana Muhammad Ali's conclusions upon minor points — sometimes they appear to us eccentric — but his premises are always sound, we are always conscious of his deep sincerity; and his reverence for the holy Quran is sufficient in itself to guarantee his work in all essentials." [33]

The fact that Mr. Pickthall was an orthodox Sunni Muslim, and who had not previously looked upon the Ahmadiyya Movement with favour, makes this tribute most remarkable and extraordinary. Muhammad Ali's commentary of the Quran as well as his book *The Religion of Islam* are based upon the principles and interpretations expounded in the writings of Hazrat Mirza, and this fact is clearly mentioned by the Maulana in his Prefaces to these works. In his Preface to the translation of the Quran he writes, while acknowledging his sources:

> "And lastly, the greatest religious leader of the present time, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, has inspired

33. *Islamic Culture,* Hyderabad, India, October 1936, pp. 659–660.

> me with all that is best in this work. I have drunk deep at the fountain of knowledge which this great Reformer — *Mujaddid* of the present century and founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement — has made to flow."

In the Preface to *The Religion of Islam*, he tells the readers:

> "Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had charged me with the writing of an English book which should contain all that was necessary for a Muslim, or a non-Muslim, to know about the religion of Islam, and to give a true picture of the religion which was largely misrepresented".

Therefore, the ideas of Hazrat Mirza presented by the pen of Maulana Muhammad Ali, which he clearly ascribed to the Ahmadiyya founder, have been applauded by orthodox, recognised Sunni religious leaders as being the true picture of Islam, as being the most valuable service for Islamic revival unmatched by anyone else, and as bringing large numbers of lost Muslims and non-Muslims towards and into Islam. How different this is from the venomous and scurrilous propaganda carried out today against the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement which portrays him as an enemy of Islam!

Other writings

Maulana Muhammad Ali also wrote many other books in English, the most famous among them being the following:

- *A Manual of Hadith* — selections from Hadith works relating to practical life, with Arabic text, translation and explanatory notes.
- *Muhammad The Prophet* — biography of the Prophet.
- *The Early Caliphate* — history of the first four Caliphs.
- *Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad* — written at invitation of a British publisher for their 'Living Thoughts' series.

- *The New World Order* — how Islam can solve the social, economic and political problems of the modern world.
- *The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement* — short biography of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

These have been translated into other languages, notably German, Dutch, French, Spanish and Russian. He also produced a large number of tracts and booklets on Islam and the Ahmadiyya Movement.

It must also be mentioned that the Maulana wrote even more extensively in the Urdu language for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. In the mid-1920s he produced an Urdu translation and commentary of the Quran, entitled *Bayan-ul-Quran,* which is much more detailed than the English work. A little later came his voluminous Urdu translation and commentary of the whole of Sahih Bukhari. Then there are several comprehensive works on the Ahmadiyya Movement, such as *Tahrik-i Ahmadiyyat* and *Al-nubuwwat fil-Islam* (both later translated into English), which deal with the claims of Hazrat Mirza and refute the Qadiani beliefs, in particular the false doctrine that he was a prophet and must be accepted otherwise one cannot remain a Muslim.

Other work of the Lahore Ahmadiyya

Besides the writings of Maulana Muhammad Ali, a vast amount of other missionary and literary work has been done by the Movement. There have been quite a number of intellectual giants, renowned missionaries, powerful speakers, and illustrious scholars and writers who have served the Movement. Among these we will, for brevity, mention only the names of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, Maulana Sadr-ud-Din, Dr. Basharat Ahmad, Maulana Aftab-ud-Din Ahmad, Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi, and of more recent times Hafiz Sher Muhammad. This list of names is not complete by any means. Their work and writings are far too vast and numerous to be noted in any detail in this article.

The enormous amount of literature produced by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement throughout its history, primarily in English and Urdu, is gradually being made available online on the website www.aaiil.org.

Woking Muslim Mission

As regards missionary work, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (1870-1932) founded the Woking Muslim Mission at the Woking mosque in England as far back as 1913. In those colonial times, for an Indian subject to establish a mission in England to refute the church doctrines so staunchly believed in at that time, and to preach Islam to the ruling masters, required the most exceptional courage and vision. It shows the extraordinary strength of faith, confidence and inspiration with which Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's followers became charged by contact with him. The Khwaja quite quickly gained a large number of British converts to Islam, including learned and eminent persons such as Lord Headley (d. 1935).

The Woking Mission presented a non-sectarian Islam, without reference to the particular beliefs of any group, not even the Ahmadiyya Movement, but its interpretation of Islam was that of the Lahore Ahmadis (for example, on issues such as the Islamic view of Jesus, war in Islam, meaning of jihad, etc.) and the Lahore Ahmadiyya literature was distributed from there. For over half a century, this Mission was the main centre of Islam in the U.K. and was regarded as representing the Muslim community as a whole. Its Imam, an office generally held by a Lahore Ahmadi, was considered as the Imam of the Muslims of the U.K. The history of Islam in Britain during this period till the mid-1960s is closely connected with the history of the Woking Mission. Besides work in Britain, the Woking Mission was also in contact with Muslims in many other parts of the world, and its literature went to countries all over the globe.

The most famous public figures of the Muslim world, such as heads of state, royalty, intellectuals, politicians, diplomats,

businessmen, literary figures etc., when visiting or staying in England, attended functions at the Woking Mission. Other people from Muslim countries who regularly came to the Mosque included university students, members of the armed forces under training in the U.K. and those pursuing various other courses. Many of these would later rise to high positions in their countries. A large number of non-Muslim visitors and enquirers also came regularly. Reports of these visits, with photographs, may be found in the pages of the Mission's monthly, *The Islamic Review,* over many decades. It is unimaginable today that the most prominent Muslim political, religious, and intellectual leaders supported a mission run by Lahore Ahmadiyya members and said their prayers following an Ahmadi imam.

In the 1960s, when the anti-Ahmadiyya Ulama from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent began to come to England in the wake of the immigration of a large number of people to this country from the subcontinent, they could not tolerate the existence of a Lahore Ahmadiyya mission in a Muslim mosque and expelled the mission from the Woking mosque.

Due to the importance of the work of the Woking Mission in the history of Islam in the West, we have created a website to provide full information about the Mission, its founding, the famous personalities connected with it, its propagation work and its publications. The website is www.wokingmuslim.org. Among the material available on it is an extensive archive of photographs and most of the issues of its organ *The Islamic Review* from 1913 to 1970. Also provided on the website are links to the British Pathe newsreel film archive, from where newsreel clips covering functions at the Woking Mosque between the years 1919 to 1958 can be freely obtained.

Berlin Mosque and Mission

Another pioneering mission is in the heart of Berlin, Germany, where a grand mosque and adjoining mission house were constructed by the Movement in 1926, under the supervision of

Maulana Sadr-ud-Din. This mission again, like Woking in England, was regarded as the centre of Islam in Germany and the representtative of all Muslims, its influence also extending to other parts of central Europe. Again like Woking, this mission too is of historical importance, and famous Muslims and converts to Islam have had contact with it. Miraculously, the buildings survived the Second World War, though much damage was incurred in the fighting towards the end of the war when Berlin was captured by the Soviet forces from the Germans. The Mosque, greatly repaired in recent years, is now a recognised national monument of Germany.

Other missions and branches

The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement has also done extensive missionary work to help Muslim communities of Indian origin settled in various countries such as Fiji, Suriname, Trinidad, Guyana, South Africa etc. As in the Indian subcontinent, the Muslims in these countries were facing attacks on Islam by Christian missionaries and the Arya Samaj Hindu sect, which the Movement went to refute and counter. As a result a large Lahore Ahmadiyya following sprang up in these countries. Indonesia is another country where the Movement has worked since the 1920s, and now has a numerous membership.

Split in the Ahmadiyya Movement

The literary works of Maulana Muhammad Ali are not his only great achievement. Posterity will be ever indebted to him for having rescued the Ahmadiyya Movement from extremism and preserved the true ideals of the Founder, Hazrat Mirza. The Ahmadiyya Movement had not been created as just another sect of Islam which, like other sects and factions, would engage in sectarian bickering and denounce fellow-Muslims of other persuasions as being *kafir* and ‘expelled from Islam’, but it was created as a force for the presentation of true Islamic ideals. Hazrat Mirza, up to even the last few days of his life in May 1908, in his reported conversations with other Muslims while

staying at Lahore, spoke of himself as a *mujaddid* [34] and assured them that he did not regard Muslims outside his Movement as *kafir*; far from it, it was the other *Ulama* who were denouncing him and his followers as being outside the fold of Islam.[35]

After Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's death, his right-hand man and a highly-learned Islamic scholar, Maulana Nur-ud-Din, who was greatly respected by Muslims outside the Ahmadiyya Movement as well, was unanimously chosen as the Head of the Movement. However, certain members of the Founder's family entertained the desire to establish a hereditary spiritual succession, but were not in a position to fulfill their ambitions as yet, especially since Hazrat Mirza's eldest son, Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, who would be the contender, was too young at this time.

Some 3 years later Mirza Mahmud Ahmad and his supporters, in order to create a platform for a leadership campaign, began to promote the view that a person could not remain a Muslim by belief in the *Kalima Shahada* and the prophethood of the Holy Prophet Muhammad only, but had in addition to acknowledge that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a prophet of God. The position taken was that, just as when the Holy Prophet Muhammad arose, the followers of earlier prophets were required to believe in him in order to become Muslims, similarly with the appearance now of the prophet Mirza Ghulam Ahmad belief in him must be acknowledged in order for anyone to be a Muslim. And belief in Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, it was further asserted, is acknowledged by taking the pledge of entry (*bai'at*) with the Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement who is the real and true head and *khalifa* of all Muslims. In a book published a little later, Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad expressed this doctrine as quoted below.

34. Statement on 25 May 1908. *Malfuzat,* vol. 10, pp. 451–452, under title 'Need for a *Mujaddid*'.

35. Statement on 15 May 1908. *Malfuzat,* vol. 10, pp. 376–378.

This extract is taken from the English translation, published by his own community, of one of his Urdu books:

> "…all those so-called Muslims who have not entered into his *bai'at* formally, wherever they may be, are *Kafirs* and outside the pale of Islam, even though they may not have heard the name of the Promised Messiah." [36]

> "I wrote that as we believed the Promised Messiah to be one of the prophets of God, we could not possibly regard his deniers as Muslims." [37]

Maulana Muhammad Ali and other prominent members of the Movement repudiated these notions as being both contrary to basic Islamic teachings as well as against the expressed beliefs of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The Maulana explains these events in an English tract published shortly afterwards in 1918 as follows:

> "M. Mahmud, a son of the founder of the movement, who is the present head of the Qadian section of the community, began to drift away from the basic principles of the Islamic faith about three years after the death of the Promised Messiah, going so far as to declare plainly that the hundreds of millions of Muslims, living in the world, should be no more treated as Muslims. … A large number of the educated members of the community, who had the moral courage to dissent openly from the erroneous doctrines taught by him, perceived the great danger to the whole community, when after the death of the late Maulvi Nur-ud-Din a particular clique in the community succeeded in raising M. Mahmud to headship at Qadian without any general consultation. They at once

36. *The Truth about the Split,* first edition, 1924; 3rd edition, 1965, pp. 55–56.

37. *Ibid.,* page 135.

> rallied round the true doctrines of the Promised Messiah, and after in vain trying for over a month and a half to keep up the unity of the movement, formed themselves into a separate Society, known as the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam,* on 2nd May 1914, which is now earnestly working for the propagation of Islam." [38]

Thus came into being the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, with two characteristic beliefs:

1. That the Holy Prophet Muhammad is the Last and Final Prophet, after whom no prophet whatsoever, new or old, can appear.
2. That believers in the Holy Prophet Muhammad form a brotherhood, and so long as a person claims membership of the brotherhood of Islam by declaring the words "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah", he cannot be expelled from Islam or branded as a *kafir* by any power on earth.

Maulana Muhammad Ali wrote extensively on these two issues, particularly in Urdu, and it may be said without exaggeration that *never before in the history of Islam* had any Muslim scholar discussed these questions so comprehensively and established these beliefs with such conclusive arguments. The general body of Sunni Muslims would, no doubt, appear to subscribe to these beliefs; however, a close inspection shows that their acceptance of these beliefs is not absolute but is subject to some conditions. The Prophet Muhammad is believed to be the Last Prophet, but it is also asserted that Jesus, a prophet, shall appear after him. And while lip-service may be paid to the *Kalima* as defining the Muslim brotherhood, nonetheless perfectly good Muslims (not just Ahmadis) are being regularly denounced as *kafir* and *murtadd* (apostate) by edicts issued by religious leaders and sects.

38. *The Split in the Ahmadiyya Movement,* Preface.

Headship and organisation of the Ahmadiyya Movement

Another related belief promoted by the Qadiani leader, Mirza Mahmud Ahmad, was that every Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement, after Hazrat Mirza, is actually appointed by God, he acts by Divine authority, he should possess absolute power, and he must be obeyed unquestioningly. In fact, he is supposed to be the real ruler and *khalifa* of all the Muslims of the time.

Quite contrary to this, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had revived the true Islamic principle of 'rule by consultation' in the governing of the Ahmadiyya Movement. Some 2 to 3 years before his death, he had published his 'Will' and in this testament he created a body called *Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya* (Chief Ahmadiyya Association) as the supreme executive of the Movement and he designated it as his "successor". He appointed fourteen men to be the executive council of this Anjuman. Later he expressly stipulated in writing that the majority decisions of this body would be final and binding after his death. No individual head was to wield absolute, autocratic power. It was, in fact, such systems of absolute religious authority that had brought previous Muslim spiritual movements to corruption and ruin. The executive body created by Hazrat Mirza was set into operation by him immediately, more than two years before his death.

After the Split in 1914, the Qadiani Movement under Mirza Mahmud Ahmad's leadership discarded the system established by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement and replaced it by absolute rule of the *khalifa.* As time went on, the office of the *khalifa* appropriated more and more power, reducing the followers to a position of the most servile submission and blind obedience.

As stated earlier, a separate body was created at Lahore in May 1914, called Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam. This is the successor, in spirit and principle, to the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya created by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. It has a council of trustees, an elected body, which is the supreme

executive of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. The Head (*Amir*) of the Movement works within the framework of the constitution and the decisions of this executive body. Maulana Muhammad Ali writes that, in the governance of the movement, after different views have been discussed "whatever is the decision of the Anjuman arrived at by a majority, that shall be followed, and no individual shall be able to override such a decision". Everyone should have the right to express their opinion, but then the majority view of the decision-making body "is decreed to be the consultative decision or the will of the community. It is then binding upon every member of the movement to obey that decision." [39]

Opposition to Movement

The Ahmadiyya Movement had from the beginning faced severe opposition, especially from the common *Ulama* and religious leaders. The extreme doctrines adopted by the Qadianis from 1914 onwards gave further ammunition to the opponents, who were able to point to Qadiani beliefs in support of their allegation that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had claimed to be a prophet. Moreover, the Qadiani claim that their *khalifa* is the real head of the Muslim *Umma,* their portrayal of themselves as a kind of Muslim government-in-waiting, and their formation inside Pakistan of almost their own state within the state, caused much resentment among the general Muslim community and suspicion in the eyes of the government. This has enabled the politically-ambitious Muslim religious leaders (now known as Muslim fundamentalists) to start large-scale anti-Ahmadiyya campaigns whenever they wished to gain prominence or to demonstrate their strength.

Ahmadis declared as non-Muslim in Pakistan

In 1974, a campaign of this kind by the religious political parties in Pakistan forced the secular government of Mr. Z.A. Bhutto to concede to their demands and insert articles in the

39. *Instructions and Guidance for the Ahmadiyya Jama'at,* p. 15.

Constitution categorising all members of the Ahmadiyya Movement, whether Qadianis or those of Lahore, as being non-Muslims. In 1984, building on this foundation, President Zia-ul-Haq issued an Ordinance which prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims or representing themselves as Muslims in any manner, or from performing certain Muslim rites and using certain Islamic terms, and stipulates criminal penalties for breaching these prohibitions. The forms issued by the Pakistan government for applying for an identity card (a compulsory requirement for every citizen) or for a passport require the applicant to state his or her religion, and in that column 'Ahmadi' is listed as a religion alongside 'Muslim', 'Christian' or 'Hindu'. Anyone describing himself as 'Muslim' is required to sign a statement declaring that he (or she) is not an Ahmadi, that he considers Mirza Ghulam Ahmad "to be an imposter" and his followers to be non-Muslims. Thus every Muslim adult in Pakistan, a large majority being illiterate, and many not even knowing who Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was or what Ahmadis are, finds himself having to declare that he believes the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement to be an imposter and all Ahmadis to be non-Muslim.

The legal and social repercussions of these repressive measures in Pakistan have been widely reported. In the wider world too, these measures and associated false propaganda have encouraged and provoked opposition to and harassment of Ahmadis in other Muslim countries, as well as among Muslim communities living in other countries, including the West.

Legal definition of 'Muslim'

It must be noted that Islam has given clear and simple definitions of who is a 'Muslim' for the purposes of law; for example, one who professes the *Kalima Shahada* by word of mouth or one who prays in the Muslim manner facing the *qibla* in Makka. To alter these definitions is entirely contrary to Islamic teachings and sets a very dangerous precedent. Thus our view is that these particular laws of Pakistan have no

validity in Islam whatsoever. Most well-informed Muslims in Pakistan consider these laws to be a mockery and travesty of both justice and Islamic teachings, and some of them have been courageous enough to say so publicly.

The question whether Lahore Ahmadis are legally Muslims has been tested in the civil courts of South Africa. In the early 1980s, a member of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement in Cape Town filed a suit against a body of Muslim clerics (known as the Muslim Judicial Council), claiming that it was defaming Lahore Ahmadis by calling them as *kafir*, and depriving them of their rights to enter mosques and to be buried in a Muslim cemetery. The local anti-Ahmadiyya *Ulama* received full support from the very top-most *Ulama,* official Islamic law experts and religious court judges of Pakistan in the preparation of their defence of calling Ahmadis as *kafir*. Most of these experts held high posts in the state institutions of Pakistan. The defendants were reluctant to allow the courts to consider from Islamic sources the question of who was entitled to be known as a 'Muslim', and in the final stages of the case in 1985 they chose not to defend the suit. The judgment was thus pronounced that the Ahmadi plaintiff "is declared to be a Muslim and as such to be entitled to all such rights and privileges as pertain to Muslims".

The Lahore Ahmadis believe that this oppression and persecution they face is part of the hardships that a Muslim must bear in the struggle to spread the truth. They consider their Movement to be fulfilling the function laid down in the Quran where it addresses the believers as follows:

> "There should be from among you a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and these are they who are successful." — 3:104

The Lahore Ahmadis believe that they are presenting the pristine picture of Islam as found in the Quran and the life and example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad; and it is the picture which meets the needs of all mankind in these modern times.

Ahmadiyya views increasingly influencing other Muslims

It is a fact that much of the knowledge and interpretation of Islam produced by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, which was originally condemned as "unorthodox" and even un-Islamic, has gradually been accepted by other Muslims. A work such as Muhammad Asad's English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran, on almost every key point of difference of interpretation between the Sunnis and the Lahore Ahmadiyya, has given the same view as that held by us. Yet this was a work originally published by the Muslim World League of Makka. In the general Muslim books today, one often finds not only the influence of Lahore Ahmadiyya ideas but wholesale passages taken from its literature, reproduced without acknowledgement of the sources. Indeed some publishers have produced reprint editions of complete books of the Movement, removing all indications of the original publisher (though not the author). Even in Pakistan such reprints of some books of Maulana Muhammad Ali, with the author's name on them, can be found in well-known book stores for sale, while exactly the same books as published by the genuine publisher (Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore) are strictly prohibited for distribution or sale by law as constituting "preaching of Ahmadiyya beliefs to Muslims"! All this gives confidence to the Movement that, despite the most powerful attempts at suppression and ostracism, its view of Islam is continuing to spread among Muslims.

Summary

To summarise, there are several facets to the beliefs and work of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement.

It is a **spiritual** movement in that it believes spiritual experiences to be actual, objective realities, and it stresses the necessity of man attaining nearness to God. Yet it is also a **rational** movement which applies the test of reason in understanding belief. It does not accept blind, unthinking belief nor

accounts of 'miracles' and supernatural occurrences when these are mere stories without evidence and any deeper lesson.

It is a **liberal** movement in the interpretation of Islamic teachings and law, but it derives its liberal stance from the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet Muhammad themselves and firmly believes in totally adhering to their injunctions.

It is a **modern** movement in that it believes that Muslims must accept all the good that the modern world has to offer and adjust to the new times, not retreat into a closed world of their own. Yet it also preaches most emphatically that the modern world cannot survive unless it accepts Islamic principles for its moral and spiritual development.

It is a **peaceful** movement which proclaims that violence in the name of religion is prohibited by Islam. It believes **passionately** in refuting the false portrayal of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and Islam by their anti-Islamic critics, but it equally believes that this must be done *only by word and argument, not by rage and threats of violence.*

It is a **tolerant** movement, which believes that Islam allows full freedom of thought, belief, religion and expression to all, to non-Muslims as well as to those within its fold; and it believes in developing dialogue, understanding and co-operation both between Muslims and others, and among Muslim sects. At the same time, the Movement strives to the utmost to convince others that the truth, in its whole form, is to be found in **Islam only,** and that the mission of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the most effective and appropriate way for the progress of Islam in this age.

Today, one full century after the death of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, a Muslim movement with these qualities **is exactly what is required** for the right progress of Muslims in the world and for establishing peace and harmony on earth between Muslims and people of other faiths and nations.

What is the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement?

It is a Muslim movement based in Lahore (Pakistan), working since 1914 to present Islam as *tolerant, rational, progressive, compassionate, peace-loving* and *highly spiritual*. This is the Islam of the Quran, illustrated in practice by the Prophet Muhammad — so vastly different from its common image.

The Lahore Ahmadiyya organization was established by some leading followers of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, six years after his death. An internal danger had arisen which altered the original aims and beliefs of the Movement as set by the Founder. In response they created a new body, headed by Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951), known as the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore* to continue and preserve the real mission of the Founder.

This Movement went on to produce world renowned literature on Islam which it disseminated widely, and to run some highly-respected Muslim missions.

The key beliefs of the Movement are:

- The Holy Prophet Muhammad was the Last and Final Prophet, after whom no prophet can come, new or old.
- All those who profess Islam by the *Kalima Shahada* are Muslims and cannot be expelled from its fold by anyone.
- We must present Islam to the world peacefully and lovingly, while living in harmony with all other people.

ISBN: 978-1-906109-03-5